

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Continuous Professional Development Programmes for English Language Teachers

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of three Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses for English language teachers in Oman. It also tries to find out the challenges that teachers face when implementing what they learned from the courses in their classrooms. Using the quantitative and qualitative data, the results indicate that the rigid top-down transmissive training system has a negative impact on the effectiveness of the courses. Moreover, the study finds that crowded classes, workload and time constraints as the major challenges that teachers face in their classes which hinder them from implementing the new knowledge and skills. The findings provide some implications for policy and practice, which are not solely applicable to Oman, but also to the Arab and Asian educational systems as many of them share similar features, especially the Gulf Cooperating Council Countries (GCCCs).

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, Transmissive training, Top-down training, Effective professional development, Oman, GCCC

1. Introduction and context

1.1 The State of Professional Development in Oman

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Oman invests heavily in providing CPDs for English language teachers. The three courses that are evaluated in this study are Cycle One (C1), Cycle Two (C2) and Post-Basic (PB). The aims of the courses include developing an understanding of the theoretical principles underlying the English curriculum, exploring some of the issues related to teaching and enabling participants to teach the English curriculum effectively.

Much focus was given to planning, designing and implementing CPDs. However, evaluating these programmes is, in many cases, ignored for different reasons. Several studies found some shortcomings regarding CPDs conducted by the MOE in Oman. Most of the programmes are prepared and delivered by the MOE without teachers' participation at the planning levels. Al-Abri (2012) stated that teachers were not involved in deciding the content of the courses or any other CPDs they received. Teachers usually attend pre-determined workshops and courses in terms of the materials provided and most importantly the topics being covered in those CPDs. In addition, teachers' needs were not analysed before nominating them to attend the training programmes. Al-Rasbiah (2006) claimed that in-service programmes in Oman are just a repetition of what teachers already know. The content provided in the training does not meet teachers' expectations and

interests. In other words, the programmes provided are top-down which usually neglect teachers' needs and interests.

Different objectives for conducting the three courses evaluated in this study were listed by the MOE. They all cover different issues, such as theories, methodologies, assessment, materials for each grade and other related issues.

1.2 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Cycle One, Cycle Two and Post-Basic courses?
2. What are the trainers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Cycle One, Cycle Two and Post-Basic courses?
3. What were the challenges, if any, that the teachers faced while implementing what they had learned in the courses in their teaching contexts as perceived by the teachers?

2. Literature review

2.1 Defining Continuing Professional Development

Different terms are used by many researchers to refer to teachers' CPD. Examples include staff development, career development, career growth, professional growth, personal development, professional learning, continuing professional development, in-service training, and others. Therefore, the literature refers to various definitions related to teachers' CPD. One of the most comprehensive definitions of CPD is given by Day (1999) who states that:

“Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives (p.4)”.

It is worth mentioning here that based on Day's definition, the three courses evaluated in this study are well-planned by experts and which directly target the performance of both the individual teachers as well as the schools.

2.2 Models of Continuing Professional Development

Previous research reports different methods for conducting CPDs (some researchers refer to them as types rather than methods, e.g., Campbell, Gilroy & McNamara, 2004). Those methods include workshops, courses, reading (books, research studies, etc), classroom observations and study groups (Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke & Baumert, 2011); university courses and programmes, blended learning, informal meetings, symposia, summer schools and seminars (Duța, 2012); conferences, training consultation in or outside schools (De Vries, Jansen & Van De Grift, 2013); action research, distance learning, peer networks, coaching, mentoring, tutoring, personal reflection and collaborative learning (Herbert & Rainford, 2013), and portfolios (Mokhele, 2014).

Nevertheless, Kennedy (2005) proposes nine models for CPDs, which can be considered as the umbrella under which the above-discussed methods can be placed. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adapted and summarised the models in the following table:

Table 1
Models of CPD as Proposed by Kennedy (2005)

Model	Description	Purpose
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports teachers to update their skills & knowledge. • Top-down: prepared & delivered by developers/ or experts. • Teachers are passive learners. • Standard-based & delivered off-site. • Effective means of introducing new knowledge. 	Transmissive (Award-bearing model was moved by Kennedy in 2014 to the transitional category)
Award-bearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on completion of award-bearing programmes of study. • Validated externally (usually by universities). • Reflect particular ideologies. 	
Deficit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses a perceived deficit in teacher performance. • Criticised as blaming the individuals only and ignoring responsibility of organisations. 	
Cascade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training events disseminated by individual teachers. • Suitable when resources are limited. • Generally, focuses on skill & knowledge, rarely on values. • Skills & knowledge are given priority over attitudes & values. • Neglects the range of learning contexts. 	
Standards-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects between teacher effectiveness and student learning. • Relies heavily on a behaviourist perspective of learning, focusing on the competence of individual teachers. 	Transitional (The category was later renamed as “Malleable”)
Coaching/ mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collegiate, but also hierarchical. • One-to-one relationship. • Assessment driven. • Quality of interpersonal relationships is crucial. • Can support either a transmission or a transformative CPD. 	
Community of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually involves more than two people, no confidentiality. • Social learning theory: community and interactions. • Negotiations between participants. • Drawback: some members dominate the interactions. 	
Action research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main aim is practitioner development and transformation. • Allow teachers to ask critical questions about their practice. • Leads to transformative practice and professional autonomy. 	
Transformative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective integration of different models. • A range of different conditions required. 	Transformative

Summarised and adapted from Kennedy (2005)

In the Omani context, ‘training’ is the prevailing model as most of the courses, including those explored in this study, are run in a top-down manner. Teachers are passive learners who are expected to update their skills and knowledge only rather than being given the opportunities to critically think about their performance which leads to transformative practice and professional autonomy, according to Kennedy’s model.

2.3 Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

Effective CPD refers to the “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes” (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017, p. 2). This means that any CPD programme should be well-planned by conducting needs analysis for teachers as well as preparing the suitable materials and resources, and it should lead to a positive result in students’ achievement. The effectiveness of any CPD programme can be conceptualised as being “composed of training acquisition and transfer of training” (Farjad, 2012, p. 2838). However, it seems that CPD in Oman is viewed as ‘structured professional learning’, but unfortunately it lacks some of the characteristics of effective CPDs since training is run in a top-down manner (Al Balushi, 2017).

Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (2011) lists different characteristics for effective professional development. They state that any CPD activity must:

- engage teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that illuminate the processes of learning and development.
- be grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven.
- be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers’ communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.
- be connected to and derived from teachers’ work with their students.
- be sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modelling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice.
- be connected to other aspects of school change.

Guskey (2003) analysed 13 of the lists of the characteristics of effective CPD “to determine if they were derived through similar procedures, based on similar frames of reference, and included the same elements or characteristics” (p. 1). He found that the individual characteristics of effective CPD varied from one list to another depending on the purposes of the training programme as well as the audiences to be targeted. Thus, he came up with the following characteristics (p. 23) as the most common ones. Programmes should:

- enhance teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge.
- provide sufficient time and resources.
- promote collegiality and collaboration.
- include procedures for evaluation.
- model high-quality instruction.
- be school-based or site-based.
- build leadership capacity.
- be built on the identified needs of the teachers.
- be driven by analyses of students learning data.
- focus on individual and organisational improvement.
- include follow-up and support.
- be ongoing and job-embedded.
- take a variety of forms.
- promote continuous inquiry and reflection.

Training in Oman takes into account some of the characteristics given in the different lists of effective CPDs, which include the focus on content and pedagogical knowledge and the focus on individual and organisational improvement. However, there is a concern that the three courses evaluated in this study lack much important factors related to the effectiveness of CPDs, such as

training needs analysis, lack of follow-up and engaging teachers in higher order thinking skills and reflection.

2.4 Evaluating Professional Development

Evaluation of CPDs has been defined differently by many researchers. Guskey (1999) defines evaluation as “the systematic investigation of merit or worth” (p. 3). This definition distinguishes informal and unconscious evaluations by referring to it with the word “systematic”. Another definition is given by Hassel (1999) who defines it as “figuring whether you are meeting your goals, why or why not, and what you should do next to improve” (p. 44). She notes that the aim of evaluation is making improvements after deciding whether the goals were achieved or not. Kelly (2006) claims that “monitoring and evaluating the impact of CPD is often a neglected area of CPD systems and procedures in a school or institution” (p. 101). “While the importance of CPD is widely acknowledged by the professions, evaluation of the impact of CPD is rarely undertaken in a systematic and focused manner” (Muijs & Lindsay, 2008, p. 196). Kennedy (2014) states that there is a limited focus on the impact of CPD in the literature. The lack of evaluation (or effective evaluation) can be attributed to the nature of the process of evaluation itself since it is difficult, costly and time-consuming (Archibald, Cogshall, Croft & Goe, 2011).

However, due to its importance in education, there is a need to evaluate the impact of CPDs (King, 2013). “Ensuring whether the training program is successfully got to the objective, an evaluation is needed” (Ikramina & Gustomo, 2014, p. 103). Though, in many cases, the evaluation relies on the overall satisfaction of the participants, and no systematic evaluation is conducted by the trainers. Hodgson & Whalley (1985) claim that the evaluation of CPDs has been given less attention compared with pre-service education. Therefore, the reason behind evaluation of CPD is to “determine the effectiveness of the training programme” (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 3). The researchers also claim that a good evaluation technique helps create indicators that explain success or even predict it. “Evaluation of professional learning is necessary to ensure the coherence and impact of a professional learning plan” (Kentucky Department of Education, n.d., p. 1). McChesney & Aldridge (2018) state that a meaningful evaluation of CPDs is critical because the effectiveness of one programme differs from the other.

2.5 The Role of Follow-up

Doherty (2011) found that most of the teachers who attended workshops did not put what they learned into practice. Transfer of training is important to make sure that the participants have mastered the skills and acquired the knowledge of the training programme. This can be done by using the different follow-up strategies, where trainers can get a general idea about the improvement in teachers’ classrooms practices. Follow-up is considered critical to effective implementation of professional development in the classroom (O’Sullivan, 2002) and this follow-up also supports the transfer of training by creating a more favourable environment for the transfer to take place (Martin, 2010). Elmore (2002) stated that any effective CPD programme should be evaluated continuously on the basis of its impacts on students’ performance since the ultimate goal of CPDs is to enhance students’ achievement.

2.6 Challenges to Teachers’ Professional Development

Al-Lamki (2009) listed some obstacles and challenges to CPD in Oman. One major obstacle that hindered teachers from attending CPDs was the lack of time. Teachers claimed that they did not have enough time to conduct or attend training programmes. Other challenges included lack of

coordination among the different departments of the MOE, teachers' workload, lack of materials and facilities and administrative problems.

However, Al-Issa (2014) stated that "ELT in Oman has suffered from a wide range of policy and practice problems" (p. 4). In her study about the Omani context, Al Balushi (2017) found that the top-down training system negatively affected the success of the CPDs. Such authoritative systems do not only affect CPDs, but also other educational aspects. For example, Al-Issa (2015) stated that the authoritative and centralised ELT system in Oman directed the implementation of the curriculum in a top-down manner, hindered teachers' use of innovative and creative teaching methods, and encouraged teaching through memorisation for the sake of achieving better in exams. This controlled ELT system led to the manipulation of the cognitive abilities of teachers for the sake of the powerful decision-makers' dominance and the hegemonic ideologies in the syllabus (Al-Issa, 2015). As a result, things that the educational authorities decide were viewed as "sacred and infallible and the only source of knowledge in the Arab World, which has had negative implications for the ruled groups' critical thinking abilities and converted them into mere knowledge recipients and users" (p. 580).

Within this vein, Sergon (2011) investigated the reasons behind Omani students' poor performance in English despite the control that the government exercises over education. He found that the MOE did not do enough to solve problems that teachers kept raising many times. Instead, the MOE officials blamed teachers for the failure to improve students' performance. In addition, students had their share of blame by these officials who accused them of being demotivated to learn English. The MOE officials interviewed "almost entirely excused any Ministry responsibility" (Sergon, 2011, p. 23). This manipulation and control as well as blaming teachers was not only applicable within the MOE as an entity responsible for implementing the ELT policy in Oman, but it was also applicable with other high-stake holders at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the university which deployed the educational job market with the most qualified teachers in Oman. For example, Al-Issa, Al-Bulushi & Al-Zadjali (2017) found that professors and other high-stake holders at SQU had the same direction in blaming teachers for their inadequacy in language proficiency and teaching skills. However, since the MOE is manipulating every aspect regarding the implementation of ELT policies in Oman, then decision-makers are not exempt from taking the responsibility of any failure because any failing on teachers' part "is an even greater failing in the Ministry's part" (Sergon, 2011, p. 28).

Therefore, the current study aims to critically investigate three courses conducted for English language teachers. This study is different than others by focusing on different parties, such as the teachers themselves and the trainers (representing the educational authorities). It is also different in the way that it focuses on long-term courses rather than teachers' perceptions and attitudes in general. The study tries to look at hidden factors impacting the effectiveness of CPDs in Oman.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The population of the study were male and female English teachers in South Batinah Governorate (Oman) who attended one of the three courses: C1, C2 and PB. The total number of participants in all courses was 75, each course with 25 participants. However, 60 teachers (80%) of the participants responded to the questionnaire. The number of female teachers was 42 and represented (70%) of the participants, while 18 were male teachers and represented 30%. This was not surprising because female teachers represent 71% of English teachers in the governorate (Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman, 2018) since these female teachers teach all students in

Cycle One as well as female students in Cycle two and Post-Basic schools. In addition to the teachers, the two trainers of the three courses participated in the study.

3.2 Design of the Study

This study adopted the mixed-method design by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. More specifically, the study followed the sequential explanatory design by collecting quantitative data first, and then the qualitative data. In such methods, researchers collect quantitative data first, and based on the findings they investigate and elaborate more when collecting the qualitative data. Using this mixed-method research helps to increase the generalisability of the results, makes data more comprehensive and helps the researcher to elaborate, extend or explain the first database (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, “the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself” (p. 535). In the case of this study, the aim of collecting qualitative data was to serve this purpose proposed by Creswell (2012) which is finding the similarities and contradictions between the two data sets.

More importantly, and to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, there has been little qualitative research about ELT in Oman (Al-Issa, 2015). While qualitative research may provide an in-depth analysis, descriptive research has only “scratched the surface and highlighted the outside story of the Omani ELT” (p. 583).

3.3 Theoretical Framework: Guskey’s Model for Evaluating CPDs

This study used Guskey’s (2002) model to evaluate the effectiveness of the three courses since it is one of the most accepted models in the educational field. This model “incorporates many of the previously mentioned concerns in evaluation that were addressed by Kirkpatrick” (Newman, 2010, p. 41) and, in addition, it was designed to be used for educational settings. Moreover, by introducing this model, Guskey provided a systematic approach to evaluation procedures of CPDs, which begins with training and ends with improvement of students’ learning (Ross, 2010). The instruments used to collect data in this study were influenced by Guskey’s model as the questionnaire was designed based on the different levels of the evaluation model.

Table 2

Guskey’s Model for Evaluating CPD Programmes

Evaluation level	What is addressed?	What is measured?	How will information be used?
1. Participants’ reactions	Did the participants like it? Was their time well spent? Did the material make sense? Will it be useful? Was the trainer knowledgeable? Did the physical conditions of the activity support learning?	Participants satisfaction with the experience	To improve the design and delivery of the training programme
2. Participants’ learning	Did participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills?	Teachers’ new knowledge and skills	To improve the content, format and the organisation of the programme

3. Organisational support and change	Was implementation facilitated and supported? Was the support public/overt? Were problems addressed quickly and efficiently? Were enough resources available? What was the impact on the organisation? Did it affect the organisation's climate and procedures?	The organisation's advocacy, support, accommodations, facilitation and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To document and improve organisational support • To improve future change efforts
4. Participants' use of new knowledge and skills	Did the participants effectively apply new knowledge and skills?	Degree and quality of information and knowledge used by the participants	To improve the implementation of programme content
5. Student learning outcomes	Did it affect students' performance and achievement? Did it influence students' physical or emotional wellbeing? Are students more confident as learners?	Students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance and achievement • attitudes and dispositions • skills and behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the programme design, implementation, and follow-up • To demonstrate the overall impact of CPD

Adapted from Guskey (2002)

3.4 The Instruments

The quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire adapted from two studies (Gokmenoglu & Clark, 2015 & Uysal, 2012) because the instruments had been already validated and used in an Asian context similar to where this study was conducted. In addition, the questionnaire from MA thesis (Al-Bulushi, 2016) which was conducted in Oman was used. However, this study used the Kirkpatrick model which was developed by Guskey to fit the educational field. This is why the researcher used Guskey's model in this study as it is more acceptable in education.

The questionnaire was based on the five levels of Guskey's framework and was designed on a 5-point Likert scale. It has six parts, adding to the demographic data that participants were asked to provide regarding their gender, age, experience, qualification and other important data before they started answering the questionnaire. The quantitative data was used to inform the qualitative data by focusing on the main results obtained from the questionnaire given to the teachers. The qualitative data was collected through a semi-structured interview for trainers of the teachers. The two trainers of the courses in South Batinah Governorate were interviewed by the researcher.

The researcher decided to give teachers the questionnaire for two reasons; teachers are teaching in a wide geographical area that is difficult to have interviews with them, and to collect as many responses as possible. This will later inform the MOE about teachers' perceptions as they are the ones doing the teaching who have the best understanding of the problems faced in the classrooms. Moreover, it was not possible to give the trainers the questionnaire since there are only two of them in the whole governorate, Therefore, the trainers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews.

3.5 Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms so that the participants can answer the survey at any time. The questionnaire was piloted to a sample which represented about 20% of the participants in this study. For the analysis stage, the data was entered in SPSS and analysed using means and standard deviations. After analysing and presenting the quantitative data, the researcher started collecting the qualitative data.

For the semi-structured interviews, the researcher followed the six steps proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis method was used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data. These themes emerged from the qualitative data and were not imposed by the researcher (Dawson, 2002). Therefore, the analysis process was data-driven which followed the inductive analysis wherein the process of coding the data. was done “without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.12). In other words, the researcher did not have pre-defined themes that guided the analysis process. Instead, themes that emerged when analysing the data were listed and named, which matches the inductive and data-driven analysis process discussed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This gave the researcher more space to consider any theme that emerged during the analysis rather than being restricted with limited themes.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instruments was checked by a panel of experts and professors from SQU, Rustaq College of Education and the MOE. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked using Chronbach Alpha (CA) in the SPSS software. Results showed that the reliability of C1 and C2 courses was .96, while the reliability of PB course was .94. This is considered an excellent score for Likert scale questions based on Chronbach Alpha (Cronbach's Alpha: Simple Definition, Use and Interpretation - Statistics How To, 2014). One possible reason for this high reliability is because the questionnaire was adapted from two studies and one MA thesis, which means that the instrument was validated more than once.

3.7 Pilot Study of the Instruments

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire to the sample of the study, it was piloted to the previous cohort of the current study using Google Forms. A number (representing about 20%) of teachers who attended the three courses previously participated in the pilot study.

In addition to the questionnaire, there was a pilot study for the semi-structured interview. Piloting interview questions is useful for the interviewer because it enables the researcher to anticipate the interview problems (Foddy, 1995). One trainer, who used to be in the same governorate and conducted the same courses, was interviewed by the researcher prior to conducting the interviews for the other two trainers. The aim of this pilot was to make sure the interview questions were clear and were constructed to answer the research questions. Based on the results of the interview, some amendments were made which included rephrasing some questions, merging and deleting other questions which served the same idea.

4. Findings

Answering the first two research questions: Teachers and trainers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the three courses

4.1 The Overall Effectiveness of the CPD Courses

An analysis of teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of C1, C2 and PB courses is presented in Table 3. Generally, teachers perceived the effectiveness of C1, C2 and PB courses as moderate or

effective with ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .56$), ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .50$) and ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .43$) respectively. The results revealed that 81.8% perceived C1 course as effective, but this percentage decreased with C2 and PB courses with 56.5% and 60% of teachers who perceived the courses as effective. On the other hand, results indicated that some teachers perceived the three courses as moderate. As shown below, 18.2%, 43.5% and 40% of the respondents perceived C1, C2 and PB courses respectively as moderate. Overall, it appears that the most effective course was C1, followed by PB and finally C2 course.

Table 3
Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of C1, C2 and PB Courses

Scale	Teachers Perceptions	Cycle One		Cycle Two		Post-Basic		The qualitative data revealed
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
64-149.3	Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0	0	
149.4-234.7	Moderate	4	18.2	10	43.5	6	40	
234.8-320	Effective	18	81.8	13	56.5	9	60	
Total	-	22	100	23	100	15	100	

that both trainers believed that the three courses were effective. However, the three courses were delivered based on the 'transmissive' training model in which CPDs are delivered to support teachers to update their skills and knowledge rather than developing their practice and professional autonomy as in the 'transformative model'. T.1 stated that:

I think most of them are effective. It depends on the teacher, whether he wants to, to improve or not, but we are following up with them. Well, what we are, let's say conducting there, we are let's say giving them some certain strategies, and they should and need to apply them. And it's their choice, whether they are going to apply them or not

Other evidence that supports the idea of the transmissive top-down training is the teachers' role as passive learners who did not take part in designing the courses and writing the aims and the objectives, as stated by T.2:

Well, I believe that most of the courses that we applied like effective ones, because usually when we come to design any course, we start designing them based on the ... the teachers' needs. So, I believe that the aims that we write down, I mean that we design, we have achieved them by the end of the courses. So that's why I believe that most of them are effective

However, what T.2 said contradicts with what the quantitative data revealed as teachers stated that there was no needs analysis conducted prior to the courses, as will be seen later.

4.2 Teachers Perceptions Based on Guskey's Framework

Based on Guskey's (2002) five levels of evaluating CPD programmes, an analysis of teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of C1, C2 and PB courses is presented in Table 4. The results showed that the first level, teachers' reactions and satisfaction with the courses, was perceived as the most effective level for C1 and PB participants with ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .89$) for C1 and ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .57$) for PB course. However, C2 participants had different views and perceived participants' learning as the most effective level with ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .53$). On the other hand, organisational support and change was perceived as the lowest effective level for all courses which means that more support is needed for teachers either while or after attending CPDs.

Table 4
Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Courses Based on Guskey's Five Levels

Level	Course					
	C1		C2		PB	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers' reactions and satisfaction	4.09	.89	3.74	.81	4.00	.57
Participants' learning	3.87	.96	3.88	.53	4.00	.52
Organisational support and change	3.71	.82	3.26	.74	3.17	.79
Impact on classroom practices	3.8	1.10	3.80	.68	3.56	.76
Students learning outcomes	3.79	.61	3.50	.73	3.22	.79

However, there was a contradiction between the quantitative and qualitative data regarding organisational support and follow-up of teachers. T.1 claimed that different parties contributed in giving feedback to teachers to make sure that students' learning is fostered using the new knowledge and skills:

Teachers were followed by us as trainers and followed up by supervisors to see if they are improving or not. So, there is some kind of, let's say, let's call it official follow up from supervisors in which they need to apply what they learned

Yet, the quantitative data revealed that follow-up visits were not intensive and were not sustained. Teachers were followed by their Senior English Teachers (SETs) and supervisors more than their trainers (these had higher mean than trainers' visits) and more importantly, not all teachers were visited by the trainers, as stated by T.2:

We just follow them up after the course finishes. So, we put, for example, a list of priorities, I mean, those teachers or trainees that we believe and feel that they need or require some follow up

T.1 mentioned that their follow-up and support focused on individual improvement by visiting teachers who needed help. However, by condoning their responsibility and excusing themselves because of their heavy work, T.1 tried to clear the trainers' side by blaming the MOE for not being able to support all teachers:

We are following up with the teacher let's say we got around 25 teachers in each course. So, because we are busy with the training we put in mind, let's say 10 of the teachers, we need to visit at least 10 of the teachers who need certain help or critical in certain areas, we visited them in their classes, and we give them the feedback they need

Another shortcoming revealed by the participants was the lack of training needs analysis. Based on the qualitative data, both trainers viewed training needs analysis as the only criterion used for nominating the participants to the courses. However, teachers were not involved neither in the nomination nor in the needs analysis process in a clear practice of the rigid top-down system, as stated by T.1:

Normally the supervisors nominate them depending on that training needs And sometimes we got some comments from the senior teachers or from the supervisors that this person needs some help with that part, or with that topic or with that skill

As for needs analysis, trainers appeared to be underestimating teachers, who are intellectuals and agents of change. Teachers had no voice regarding their own needs because they lack the knowledge to differentiate between their needs and interests, as claimed by T.2:

The main factors actually the teachers' needs, and we believe that the teachers' needs are like determined and identified by the SET and the supervisors based on the visits they apply with the teachers. Usually what comes from the teachers are called interests, most of the teachers are not

aware of their own needs. So, they call that they are interested in certain areas, but what we discover and sometimes we see that these are not their real needs. So, we need to, like, get the teachers be aware that there is difference between interest and needs. And usually we depend on the supervisors in really picking up or choosing those teachers

What was stated by the two trainers above was then contradicted by the statement of T.1 who claimed that training is built on the identified needs of the teachers. Though, the trainer appeared to blame other agents (mainly supervisors and SETs) in case there was a failure in the process of needs analysis:

We design the courses based on their (teachers) needs, so we don't design something that we want the teachers just to, to just take it and go back to school. We go around the school, we go around with the supervisors, with the senior teachers to get the real training needs for each teacher. We can say it's a bottom up and at the same time, top-down process

Despite T.2 statement that “*teachers’ comments and feedback are really valued because teachers are the ones who are in the field*”, this trainer supported the idea of the top-down process where teachers have no voice in designing the materials of the courses by saying that “*sure, we (trainers) create our, I mean, we adapt it, we redesign it in a way that really matches the teachers ... like needs, the priorities that they put as needs*”.

4.3 Answering the third research question: Challenges that the teachers faced while implementing what they had learned in the courses in their teaching contexts.

An analysis of the challenges that teachers faced in their classrooms after their participation in the courses is presented in Table 5. It was found that crowded classes, workload (intense curriculum and textbook requirements), time constraints and students’ level were the most frequent challenges that the participants from the three courses faced. On the other hand, there was an agreement between the respondents, to a large extent, that classroom management problems and lack of technological equipment in the school were the least frequent challenges.

Table 5

Challenges that Teachers Faced When Implementing New Knowledge and Skills in the Classrooms

Challenges	Course					
	C1		C2		PB	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Crowded classes	8.40	1.40	6.30	2.86	6.06	2.34
Intense curriculum & textbook requirements	6.00	2.07	5.56	2.12	5.13	2.64
Time constraints	5.95	1.98	5.04	2.01	5.40	2.47
Low English level of students	5.95	2.12	7.04	2.56	6.46	2.77
Using different assessment tools	4.63	1.55	4.65	2.28	4.73	1.83
Unsupportive school management	4.09	2.74	4.34	2.16	3.93	2.73
Insufficient materials & resources	3.40	2.46	4.47	2.31	5.06	2.63
Classroom management problems	3.31	1.88	3.82	2.70	3.66	2.91
Lack of technological equipment in the school	3.22	1.87	3.73	2.50	4.60	2.02

The qualitative data also revealed that both trainers shared the same concern with teachers that classrooms are crowded with many students. T.1 stated that “*teachers got that kind of crowded classes*”. The trainer referred to the nature of the top-down training in Oman and the role of policy-makers in such issues by claiming that many problems in schools are out of trainers’ control. In

other words, T.1 tried to clear the trainers' side by blaming the MOE for such problems; and avoided mentioning their roles in helping teachers solve such problems:

Sometimes when we got some meetings there, in the Ministry of Education, we raise those points to them. And they need to, let's say, it's part of their job to look at those teachers and help them in doing their job in the right way, changing the size of the class or changing something in the school, it's not our let's say, we are not responsible about it

Workload and intense curriculum were also found by the qualitative data as challenges that affected teachers' practice of the knowledge and skills from training courses. In the open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire, one teacher reported that they could not cope with the course and teaching at the same time because they had many duties to accomplish. In addition, C1 course did not address special issues that teachers with younger learners usually face. For example, the course failed to equip teachers with the necessary strategies to deal with talkative and hyperactive students due to the nature of training those teachers received since the transmissive top-down training aims to update teachers' knowledge only. This failure to focus on the practical side could result in other challenges as reported by T.2:

They (students) are talkative and hyperactive. So, we find most of the complaints from female teachers about classroom management and unlike males, because they are not teaching C1, so we feel that this is like a big issue. They always ask about this topic, according to their needs, that they want classroom management strategies in order to control those students

However, this trainer seemed to avoid talking about their roles in giving teachers some strategies to deal with talkative students. Instead, the trainer appeared to blame teachers for their 'complaints' about the difficulties that teachers faced in their classrooms. Moreover, the design and the materials of the three courses were not driven by analyses of students' data. For example, although students' level was perceived as a challenge, trainers, as with crowded classes, did not seem to think about it by saying that "I don't have a hand on it". Trainers in this case used manipulation technique and blaming others for any shortcomings in the courses.

However, trainers seemed not to be aware of the challenges that their trainees faced. While the quantitative findings revealed that technology was not a major issue to teachers, T.2 said that "they (teachers) stay complaining about that they have difficulties regarding the network coverage in their schools" and added that "we (trainers) discovered that some teachers, are not fully aware of the application of these different (assessment) tools. Sometimes they mix between the use of these tools, sometimes they are not aware when to use them". The trainers avoided talking about their roles during the interviews because they kept blaming teachers and the MOE for the different issues arose during or even after the courses.

5. Discussion

The results from the questionnaire showed that teachers have a good level of satisfaction regardless of the many shortcomings revealed. One possible reason for this is that teachers tend not to criticise the MOE as experts have designed CPD courses. In addition, teachers are not trained to be critical when it comes to their performance. It also seems that the length of the questionnaire led to respondents' fatigue who want to quickly finish answering the statements without having enough time to think. Therefore, some interviews should have been done with some of the questionnaire respondents to dig deeper on some issues revealed by the quantitative data.

The quantitative and qualitative data revealed that, besides some positive perceptions, there were some recurring themes and shortcomings regarding the effectiveness of the courses which resulted from the authoritative, controlled and centralised top-down ELT system (Al-Issa, 2015). These included a lack of systematic training needs analysis, the transmissive top-down training and ELT

policy, manipulation and playing the blame game and lack of follow-up visits to teachers after the completion of the courses. The study revealed that the top-down transmissive training system proposed by Kennedy (2005) resulted in negative outcomes regarding the courses. Based on this model, CPDs aim to update teachers' skills and knowledge only because setting the goals of the courses and preparing the materials are done by the MOE. In other words, CPDs in this model are delivered by the experts or developers of the training programmes. This means that teachers have less autonomy and no voice in choosing topics or materials to be covered in the courses. In addition, training in this model focuses more on the theoretical side than the practical one. As a result, this training system as well as the ELT policy in Oman resulted in negative outcomes regarding the effectiveness of C1, C2 and PB courses.

There is one common denominator for all these shortcomings and the different themes, which is the rigidity of the training system and the ELT policy in Oman which suffered from "a wide range of policy and practice problems" (Al-Issa, 2014, p.4). In other words, these shortcomings were an inevitable result of the top-down transmissive training system, wherein the MOE has not done enough to solve many issues (Sergon, 2011) although they were raised by different researchers (e.g. Al-Abri, 2012; Al Balushi, 2017; Al-Issa, 2015; Sergon, 2011).

The MOE needs to take different steps in order to increase the effectiveness of the courses and other CPD programmes conducted for English teachers in Oman. For example, trainers should have a clear and realistic plan to visit all the participating teachers in their classrooms to ensure real implementation of new knowledge and skills in the classrooms and to give feedback and support for teachers. Trainers' visits should not be limited to some teachers only, but instead all teachers have the right to be supported and evaluated based on their classroom performance.

Other steps might be considered at the organisational level, wherein the MOE should change the training policy it follows regarding training. Rather than manipulating and controlling all aspects related to these training programmes by their rigid, top-down system, a transformative training as suggested by Kennedy (2005) may solve many of the problems that teachers face before, during and after conducting CPDs. Teachers need their voice to be heard so that they can improve their practice, which will eventually have positive effects on students' performance. Therefore, the change in the training policy should include opportunities to redesign the structure of the courses with teachers' participation in all levels of the design.

In addition, the MOE should address teachers' training needs through creating a roadmap to consider needs analysis as part of the trainers' job, which should be done systematically. Experienced people should conduct the analysis based on different criteria, which is expected to serve two major aims. First, it will help to design and prepare appropriate materials for all trainees rather than preparing the same materials for them as one-size-fits-all. Second, it will increase teachers' eagerness to attend and take positive part during the courses because they expect that the materials are prepared for them and based on their suggestions, needs and interests. This might increase teachers' learning and satisfaction with the courses.

Regarding the challenges that teachers face in their classrooms, the MOE needs to make a long-term plan that considers the available resources and budgets to solve many problems, such as crowded classes and teachers' workload. In addition, the MOE should increase the number of the trainers in the governorate so that trainers are able to visit all teachers in their classrooms, which was also recommended by Al-Abri (2012).

6. Conclusion

The MOE invests heavily on training teachers with different opportunities that are expected to improve classroom practices. However, the Ministry officials must bear in mind that the top-down transmissive training does not meet teachers' needs and expectations. With the many changes in teachers' roles and the availability of the new training methods, the old view of dealing with teachers and training programmes might not help to achieve the goals of the Ministry regarding training. A new training system that considers the recommendations and implications from this study and other studies might help improve the different training programmes run by the MOE.

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